

Amendment to the Specification

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 6, line 14, with the following rewritten paragraph.

One aspect of the present invention provides monoclonal antibodies, including human monoclonal antibodies, which bind to the dominant HCV types in major geographical areas. The dissociation constants for these the antibodies for to their epitopes ranges from are, for example, less than $10^{-7}M$, to less than $10^{-8}M$, to less than $10^{-9}M$, and less than $10^{-10}M$. Specifically, a family of monoclonal antibodies binding to conformationally conserved epitopes of the HCV E2 protein is provided. Among the family are antibodies that bind to the dominant genotypes found in the United States, so as to be substantially pan-monoclonal antibodies in being able to bind to almost all cases of HCV infection, which have been diagnosed in the United States, as well as at least a substantial proportion of the cases in other geographic locales. The monoclonal antibodies find use in a variety of diagnostic assays. In addition, conformationally conserved expression of recombinant type 1 and type 2 HCV E2 proteins and fragments thereof are provided for use in assays, screening drugs, vaccines, diagnostic assays, and for other purposes. The inventive antibodies find use in passive immunotherapy strategies for reducing viral load of infected individuals and interfering with the infection of target cells. Antibodies recognizing conformationally dependent epitopes can also be used to provide a template for the rational design of peptide and conformationally-defined epitope mimetics (e.g., organic compounds, organometallic compounds, inorganic compounds, small molecules).